

District Name: Cambrian Elementary School District
CDS Code: 43 – 69385 – 0000000

Abstract of the Application

We propose to establish the Cambrian Charter School District with five Charter Schools comprising the current Cambrian School District. To achieve Charter District status we propose a one-year plan leading to charter petition approval and implementation on July 1, 1999. The four areas of focus for this grant proposal include:

1. Creating Capacity to Meaningfully Involve our Parent Community
2. Creating Capacity for Professional Growth and Decision Making
3. Creating a Whole-School Local Control Focus
4. Creating Accountability Using Meaningful Assessments

We are currently involved in many school reform initiatives. Our schools and district are leadership members in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative; Noyce Foundation early literacy and mathematics grant recipients; and leaders in the area of parent involvement. We want to build on our past successes and new freedoms afforded schools in Charter Districts.

We will meaningfully involve our community in the education of their children through demonstrable activities. Those school-focused activities will include opportunities to become meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes of each individual school site.

To make the transition to a more site-focused Charter District, we need to train staff in new processes for making decisions and planning professional growth activities around the needs of each school's students. Our Support Providers, with significant involvement of the California Teacher's Association, will aide in training staff in site specific processes to help them make important decisions in their schools.

Another focus of our Charter District will be on whole-school local control. The district will provide necessary services, review and adopt content standards and assessments, and review accountability measures. Each school will be accountable to ensure that students achieve performance standards in both academic and social content areas. School communities will have great freedom in utilizing strategies that work best to meet standards adopted by the district.

Our processes and philosophy will not benefit in increased student achievement unless we ensure that all students are learning. The district will review and revise our current content standards and assessments in each content area, with literacy and mathematics coming first. Each child will receive instruction leading to mastery in each content area. We will provide assessments that provide feedback to students, parents, and staff throughout the school year that will help guide instruction.

We believe that by becoming a Charter School District we will become an even better place for kids because it will allow parents and staff the option to provide site specific instructional solutions for our children's education.

Cambrian Charter Elementary School District

California Public Schools Grant Application

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I. Cambrian Charter District's Educational Vision

A. Baseline Information About the District

Cambrian School District currently serves 2,800 kindergarten through eighth grade students in five schools located in west Santa Clara County (San Jose, Campbell, and part of Los Gatos). Our ethnic breakdown is 68% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, 11% Asian, 5% African American, and 1% other. Approximately 6% of our students receive Aide to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and 24% receive free or reduced lunches. On standardized norm referenced tests (CTBS) in 1997, our students scored in the 77th percentile in mathematics and 68th percentile in reading for grades one through eight. This is a 15-point improvement over five years ago in both reading and mathematics. Parents move into our area because of the excellent reputation of the schools characterized by four of our five schools receiving California Distinguished Schools status over the past four years.

The population we seek to serve is our neighborhood students, as well as students in surrounding districts. We currently accept 250 students (or ten percent) of our enrollment from surrounding school districts on interdistrict transfers. There are no charter schools or charter districts in Santa Clara County . We propose to serve families that are looking for an alternative educational placement for their elementary students.

B. Educational Vision

“The vision of the Cambrian School District, a small, stable, child-centered, neighborhood community, is to develop responsible citizens for tomorrow who will be lifelong learners by providing a challenging, high quality, academic program designed to meet individual potential supported by collaborative efforts of dedicated students, parents, staff, and community.” Our Board of Trustees adopted this vision statement in 1993. In March 1998, a team of 23 members of our community readopted this vision statement representing our school district. We would continue to support this vision as a Charter School District comprised of five Charter Schools.

The major foci of our educational vision in becoming a Charter District is for 1) meaningful community involvement, 2) expanded professional growth and whole school decision making, 3) whole school local control, and 4) accountability through quality assessments. We think that by becoming a Charter District we will have the freedom and ability to do even greater things for kids.

Our work revolves around our vision, priorities, and our four focus areas. These goals will involve and hold staff, students, and parents accountable.

Site-based decision making

We are committed to having the key decisions affecting our students made at the school level with active involvement of staff, parents, students and community members. True reforms, leading to marked improvement in student achievement, occur when the local community works through the process and dialogue of change. Our five schools have been actively engaged for two

years in training around site-based decision management using norms and consensus, shared decision making, conflict resolution, and structures to manage whole school change.

This training has laid a solid foundation for meaningfully involving everyone in the vision and forward direction of the school. Our work has taught us several significant lessons:

1. Our community with knowledge and opportunities to participate in the school's work will support good researched-based teaching practices.
2. Diverse perspectives provide fertile ground for the most successful practices.

For these reasons we are committed to structures that foster total school inclusion in the school change process.

Parent Involvement

Traditionally, we have designed many opportunities for parent involvement and participation. Our more recent work has shifted our focus away from fundraisers and spirit builders. "High Leverage" activities are currently being designed and tried at our schools. Parent forums shift our focus to student work, assessment, and teaching practices.

Workshops that provide parents with the knowledge and tools to help their child have been our starting point. From here we have now began parent forums where questions around student standards assessment can be explored. Data on parent involvement during 1997-98 has been enlightening. As we use parent forums for dialogue, parent involvement and interest in student achievement has increased. We believe we have tapped a valuable resource as we engage parents more deeply into their child's education and the focused work at our schools.

We found that only using standardized test scores to analyze progress in mathematics and reading is limited for a variety of reasons 1) we were able to analyze and disaggregate data for specific target groups but we were only able to target trends for grade to grade within and among schools, and 2) standardized testing didn't provide teachers and administration with specific information that could be used to guide instruction.

As we began to develop specific content standards in reading in 1996, the need for specific ongoing data on each student became apparent. We realized that new tools will be needed to measure individual student growth, identify progress of specific target groups (low achievers, male/female, GATE, second language learners) to ensure that all students are progressing successfully.

Professional growth over the past two years Cambrian School District has focused its attention on researched-based practices. Perhaps our most significant district-wide focus in professional growth has occurred in the examination of current brain research.

Understanding how students learn has provided the solid foundation to build a coherent and powerful professional growth program across the district. Our recent undertaking of district-wide specific literacy focus is grounded in brain research.

In addition, each school has developed literacy leadership teams to plan and keep schools focused and on track. These teams, comprised of staff and parents, form the central core for the development of a district leadership design team. Although each school's work will result in specific differences based on school needs, our district design team will serve as a forum to ensure support, validation and accountability across the school district. We are convinced that the structures currently being designed will serve to harness the talent across our schools.

Our professional development model is centered on learning in defined focused areas including dialogue and collaboration among staff and systematic coaching. We believe that all three elements must be in place to ensure a professional development plan that will result in systematic change across our district.

II. Description of Grant Project Goals and Activities for Approval of a Charter Proposal

A. Grant Project Goals and Objectives

Outlined in Table 1 are our project outcomes and our assessment plans. We have taken the four areas of focus and created outcomes for each of the four affected stakeholder groups: students, teachers, community, and the district. After each outcome we have listed measures to determine how each outcome will be assessed.

Table 1. Project Outcomes and Assessment Plan

Group	Outcome	Measure
Students	<p>Will improve achievement in literacy and mathematics.</p> <p>Will receive instruction based on adopted content standards.</p>	<p>The percentage of students scoring a 4 or above on performance-based writing and the number of students above grade level in reading and mathematics will increase 10% in two years.</p> <p>Students will receive instruction in the areas of mathematics and literacy based on the student content standards.</p>
Teachers	<p>Will participate in training for decision making and developing and using content and performance standards.</p>	<p>All certificated staff will receive site specific training in decision making and using standards to guide instruction by our Support Providers and staff from within the District. District teachers and CTA will be involved in developing the professional development model.</p>
Community	<p>Will participate in training to encourage meaningful involvement of parents in the education of their children and decision making.</p>	<p>Each of the five schools will conduct forums and trainings for parents in the areas of parent involvement and decision making. There will be a 25% increase in parent participation over a two-year period. Support providers will assist schools in creating more meaningful parent involvement.</p>
District	<p>Will rewrite policies that are in line with Charter District status.</p> <p>Will provide opportunities for staff and community members to meet with Charter Schools and Districts to plan for our new district status.</p>	<p>All District policies will be reviewed, rewritten, and adopted by the Board of Trustees by June 30, 1999. Community input will be used in the rewriting of these policies.</p> <p>At least five school visits will be made to learn about Charter Schools and Charter Districts by community/Board of Trustee/staff members. Public forums will be held to receive public input on proposed charter status.</p>

B. Identification of Planning Needs for the Development of an Effective District Plan

1. Educational Capacity

Create Capacity to Meaningfully Involve our Community

Research shows that one of the most powerful variables in the success of students is the meaningful involvement of parents in the education of their children. We have had success at one of our schools in creating meaningful “high leverage” activities for parents. We hope to replicate the results of our Fammatre Elementary Parent Partnership at other school sites.

Fammatre Elementary School, assisted by a \$350,000 Bay Area School Reform Collaborative grant, has developed an exemplary parent participation model. Some of the capacity building activities in getting our community involved include the BEAR (Be Enthusiastic About Reading) Breakfast program, Reading Under the Stars, Community and School Site Forums, and Partners in Print. These programs were initially run by the instructional staff but will eventually be directed by parents. These programs powerfully link classroom instruction to the home. Parents learn skills and strategies in these programs.

We plan to hold multiple events at each school to encourage parents’ participation in the education of their students. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to review and analyze data collected by teachers and will provide input regarding school change and the development of our parent participation component for the District Charter.

Create Capacity to Implement Staff Professional Growth and Whole School Decision Making

Staff development is focused around what we call our “critical questions.” The school community focuses on what it believes are its “critical questions”, or issues that it chooses to address that most affect student success. Through our “Cycle of Inquiry” process, each school develops its “critical question” and then a staff professional growth plan. As part of this plan, schools also adopt a decision-making model that fits their needs.

To date we have one school that is using this model for determining professional growth needs. We plan to include all school in this model by using our “Critical Questions” and “Cycle of Inquiry.” With our current funding structure, schools have many resources to draw upon to meet their professional development needs. To transition to these new models, we will employ Support Providers and district staff to work with our schools to help them with their processes.

We are committed to focusing on student success to drive our professional growth and decision making processes. With success that we have observed as a result of these processes, we feel that including them throughout the district will result in more success for our children.

Create Capacity to Implement Whole-School Local Control

We believe that educational change and improvement is best facilitated by a whole-school local control philosophy. We have seen great results in using this philosophy in the Cambrian School District.

Cambrian has worked over the past six years to move decision making to the personnel who are most directly affected by decisions. This has resulted in many decisions that were previously made at the district level are now being determined at each individual school site. For example, formerly the district required each site to spend a certain percentage of their budgets in mandated categories. Now dollars are allocated to each site and each site makes resource allocation determinations.

There is a significant role for the district in working with individual school sites. The district office does a good job of overseeing fiscal accountability, purchasing, operations, maintenance, food service, transportation, technical support, special education, accountability, assessing program success, writing policies, adjudicating disagreements, providing a forum for public input, assistance with categorical programs, and human resources support.

There is also a highly significant role for each individual school site. Each school site is responsible for resource allocation, curriculum development, professional development, community participation and involvement, instructional material selection, time allocation, and pupil personnel issues. To make good decisions, schools must develop decision-making models that best support student success. Through this grant we hope to develop and implement decision-making processes to support our goals.

We hope to formalize the transition from a district directed organization to a whole-school focus district during this charter adoption process. The District's role will be to provide support and service to schools that are charged with achieving student success. Our District will also approve standards for student achievement and monitor accountability measures for each school site.

The District will adopt standards, policies, and multiple-year priorities. The following five priorities have been approved for the next two years by the Board of Trustees and were developed by a community planning team of 23 members. These priorities build on our district vision and our four foci for becoming a Charter District included in this grant.

Cambrian School District Priorities 1998-2000

1. We will implement instructional strategies in literacy that will enable all students to meet or exceed grade level standards.
2. We will meet the changing needs of students by providing appropriate interventions.
3. We will develop student responsibility and accountability with parents as partners in the education of the child.

4. We will provide staff development opportunities that lead to ongoing improvement and growth.
5. We will use standards and multiple assessments to guide instruction towards increased student achievement and success.

Create Capacity to Implement Accountability through Meaningful Assessments

We have been involved in developing a standards-based curriculum for several years. Through training from West Ed, we have determined that it is important for staff to see for themselves the critical need for standards. To ensure that the standards developed are used, there must be ownership. We move slowly and carefully to ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders (teachers, parents, district office personnel) which can elevate the quality of the work being done in this area. We will effectively tackle one question at a time. We will attempt to link all existing data and data collection tools to the standards as they are developed to make data collection meaningful; i.e., have data tell us “how good is good.” Our standards are based on the California State Education Standards and California State Frameworks.

Our goal is to create standards and benchmarks that provide evidence about student learning over time for all groups of students. In addition to traditional norm referenced standardized tests, we hope to integrate our other assessments to provide formative assessment of student progress. Other assessment measures that we are currently using include running records, holistic writing samples, holistic reading samples, alternate rankings for literacy, and portfolio assessment.

The continuous development and refinement of performance and content standards is crucial to the success of our reform efforts. We need meaningful assessment data to ensure that we are accountable for student learning.

2. The Business and Organizational Management Capacity of the School

Our school district is well managed and our facilities are well maintained. With a \$7 million reserve and a conservative fiscal approach, we are one of the more economically healthy districts in California. Our district is comprised of seven schools with five currently operational. Rental income nets the district almost \$500,000 annually. Over the past five years we have received no audit exceptions in our annual audit of district accounts. Our business staff is well trained with highly qualified and tenured employees. With a fully funded five-year deferred maintenance and capital expenditure plan, we maintain excellent facilities with no district bonded indebtedness.

Our Board of Trustees proposes to follow standard best practices in fiscal management after becoming a Charter District. During this planning year, the Board will review fiscal policies and procedures and make changes as necessary. Our focus will be on whole school change by providing schools with the opportunity and resources to make changes in decision making models, curriculum, resource allocation, technology implementation, instruction, and staff development.

The Board of Trustees will maintain responsibility for the fiscal and operational integrity of our district.

3. Collaborative and Networking Strategies

Our district is an active member of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, maintains multiple business partnerships, works with area schools as part of the Learning Alliance, and is beginning a relationship with the California Teachers Association in the area of school reform work. In addition, we have met (and will continue to meet with) the Kingsburg Union Charter Elementary District to share their journey in becoming a Charter School District. The San Carlos Elementary School District has also been helpful in sharing their experiences with charter schools.

We will continue to work with other Support Providers as determined by individual school need. We will utilize West Ed for standards development, Rena Walker and the Noyce Foundation for literacy training, Marilyn Aden (CTA resource) for decision-making and conflict management, and Leadership Connection for decision-making and leadership development.

We work with local, area, state, and national resources in building quality programs for our district. As a District Charter School we will seek new alliances and “critical friends” to work with in our school reform efforts.

4. Overall Program Evaluation

The final responsibility for the evaluation and implementation of both the Charter District and this Charter District Grant Proposal lies with the Cambrian School District Board of Trustees. Each school site leadership team will work with their communities to develop annual work plans to improve student success. Three times each year the leadership team will conduct forums with the community to analyze student progress and instructional practices of the school change process based on its Critical Questions.

Each site’s culminating activity will be an annual accountability forum with stakeholders at the end of the academic year to dialogue about where the school has been and where it is going. During this accountability forum data will be presented to the community on student learning and progress in both academic and social areas. Each of the five schools will focus on its “critical question” and the district’s priority areas.

A final district accountability forum will be held each May. Members of the five leadership teams from each site will meet to share their data and final year-end reports. Schools will act as “critical friends” for other leadership teams providing validation and suggestions for improvement. Our Board of Trustees will be actively involved in this final accountability dialog.

The major differentiation from current practice to new behaviors is a focus on a true open and honest community ongoing dialog about the work of the schools. This dialog will focus on data collection and information gathered by all stakeholders. In the end we will have stakeholders who have ownership of the process and results. We believe that these forums will provide accountability measures that will empower and invigorate stakeholders to work together for our children.

C. Support for Getting the Charter Petition Circulated and Approved

1. Specific Activities and Work to Be Done

Our Board of Trustees is supportive of the Charter District concept. Through further discussions and a formal board resolution of support, we feel that the petition will have the support of our total school community.

We will involve our local Cambrian District Teacher's Association (CDTA) and the California Teacher's Association (CTA) in developing and implementing our District Charter. By involving our teachers at the beginning stages of the Charter District approval process, we feel that we will successfully gather the signatures necessary to petition the State Board of Education. Through CDTA's and CTA's support, teachers will feel comfortable and supportive signing the charter petition.

We will include our total school community in forums throughout our district. Each forum will include ways that we can build on our Charter District concept. Parents will be involved in creating a parent-student-school contract. In addition, parents will be involved in developing and implementing a decision making model specific to each school site.

2. Justification for Use of Grant Funds

We will use grants to support our efforts to reach our educational vision of a whole-school local controlled school district. Our plans include using the funds for training, consultants, extra duty pay, and substitute coverage for teachers. No dollars are allocated for capital purchases in this grant.

III. Self Assessment and Procedures for Monitoring Progress Towards Completion of The Charter Proposal

Phase One – June through September- Gathering Information

Working with Board Members, CTA staff, district staff, administrators, and parent leaders, information will be gathered regarding our application for a Charter District. We will visit other Charter Districts and draft initial aspects of our new Charter.

Phase Two- September through December- Writing the Charter

A final Charter petition will be written and submitted to the Board of Trustees to hold hearings on the Charter petition. Each school will hold forums explaining our plans. In December we will circulate charter petitions for necessary signatures.

Phase Three- December through June- State Approval and Training

The signed District Charter petition will be submitted to, and approved by, the State Board of Education. Training will begin with our school communities on decision making, curriculum development, parent involvement, and accountability through assessment. Advertising our Charter District status will begin in our area.

Phase Four- July 1, 1999- Cambrian becomes Charter District

The transition to Charter District status begins with implementation of our parent participation program, staff development initiative, decision making model, and focus on whole school change.

Budget Narrative

Parent as Partners Project

Beginning in Fall of 1998, we will begin working with all five schools to being working on our Parents as Partners project. This will include initial training of staff and parents in the process that is to be used at each site. In addition, staff will be hired to aide the parents in these evening meetings.

Total Cost of Support Providers (Partners in Print consultant): \$2,000

Cost for extra duty stipends: \$2,500

District Contribution: \$10,000

(from general funds for materials, training, meeting costs, and staff time)

Staff Decision Making Training

Each school will select a leadership team of four teachers, principal, and parents to be trained in leadership with a focus on decision-making processes. Leadership Connection, Inc. will provide training during the summer and the fall.

Consultant Costs: \$6,000

Substitute Costs: \$8,000

District Contribution: \$4,000

(from general funds for materials, staff time, and meeting costs)

Standards Development in Literacy

After our leadership team has worked with each school site staff in decision making, we will focus on writing standards for literacy that will be the basis of our accountability process. To minimize costs, we will do as much of this work as possible during our short Wednesdays (every

Wednesday students are released early so that teachers can participate in staff professional development and standards writing.) The District has received grant dollars to assist with this program from other sources in addition to allocating \$15,000 of our general fund dollars. The funds that this grant would assist would be in the consensus process of making our decisions about district-wide standards.

Extra Duty Pay for Teachers: \$5,000

Substitute Costs: \$4,000

District Contribution: \$60,000

(from grants from the Noyce Foundation and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative for staff time, substitute coverage, support provider costs, and conference costs).

Charter Writing and Policy Review

A Charter Petition will be drafted by the District Charter Leadership Team. This team, composed of parents, teachers, and administrators will visit other school districts and review other Charters. Extensive time will be needed at the District Level to review and amend our policies. Each school site will need to develop procedures and processes to guide their schools. We will use Leadership Connection, Inc., and the California Teacher's Association as our Support Providers in this area.

Costs for Extra Duty Pay: \$5,000

Cost for Substitutes: \$1,000

Cost for Support Providers: \$2,000

District Contribution: \$5,000

(from general fund for copy expenses, clerical, staff time, and meeting costs)